BX
4700
M37
V3

MARIAN MYSTIC

a short life of

St. Mary Magdalen de' Pazzi

by

Francesca van der Kley, T.O.Carm.

1957
Carmelite Third Order Press
6415 Woodlawn Avenue, Chicago 37

Theology Library
SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY
AT CLAREMONT
California

Imprimi potest:

Very Rev. Raphael P. Kieffer, O.Carm.
Prior Provincial

Nihil obstat:

Rev. Romaeus W. O'Brien, O.Carm.
Censor Deputatus

Imprimatur: *February 2, 1957*

✠ **Samuel Cardinal Stritch**
Archbishop of Chicago

Copyright 1957 by
Carmelite Third Order Press, Chicago

CONTENTS

Preface 7
1. Background 12
2. Birth of Catherine 14
3. Childhood 17
4. Holy Communion 21
5. Convent Life 24
6. A Vocation Decided 26
7. Carmel 28
8. Novitiate 31
9. Profession of Vows 35
10. Ecstasies 39
11. Raptures of Love 41
12. Dialogues 45
13. The Blessed Virgin 49
14. Three Virtues 51
15. Suffering 54
16. Years of Trial 57
17. Temptations 60
18. Days of Atonement 65
19. Her Gifts 69
20. Offices and Teachings 72

21. Reverence 76
22. Purely for God 78
23. Crescendo 80
24. The Sub-Prioress 83
25. Her Last Days 87
26. Unto Death 90
27. Miracles and Glory 93
28. Lustre That Lasts 95

PREFACE

SAINT Mary Magdalen died when she was forty-one years old; twenty-four of those years had been spent in the cloistered Carmel of the strict Ancient Observance in the city of Florence, Italy. One of the greatest mystics, she deserves a place along side of the great St. Teresa of Avila and St. John of the Cross.

Realizing how each sin in some way blocks the efforts of Jesus to capture the hearts of men, Mary Magdalen had a burning desire to erase all sin, shed bitter tears when she discovered the futility of her desire. Yet she understood that these very sins of others could be matched with an increase in her own love for God. So each prayer, every sacrifice became for her an act of reparation and love united with the Passion of Christ and the sorrows of His Mother.

Our Blessed Lord caused her to appreciate the privilege of suffering with Him when He spoke to her in one of the most touching visions of

her life. On this particular occasion Jesus placed in her heart the instruments of His Passion, but did not leave His crown of thorns. The Saint reminded Him of this fact: "Then, showing me two crowns, one of thorns, the other of very beautiful flowers, He said: 'Tell Me, which one do you want?' And I replied: You know well which one! And He, making as though to give me the one of flowers, said smilingly: 'Well, I give it to you—it is this one, isn't it?' Then I said: No, no, Love, not that one at all. You know quite well which one! And then He put the one with the thorns into my heart along with the other sheaf, and He told me He would keep the flowers for me."

She tried constantly to love God in others. A favorite bit of advice she gave was: "Keep your eyes always open to the virtues, and closed to the imperfections, of your neighbor." So great was her love for the sick that she asked to be carried to the sick that she might comfort them. In extreme pain herself, soon to die, deprived of spiritual consolation, she would pass off her

own sacrifice, saying: "The Bridegroom does not come to me; I will be near them (the dying) when He comes for them."

The spirit of Carmel, so beautifully taught to our modern world by St. Therese, the Little Flower, in her formula of littleness and complete abandonment, can be recognized in one of Mary Magdalen's last ecstasies. She addresses Our Lord with the words: "O my Jesus, Thou wilt that I become as a very little girl, nay, Thou wilt that I be born again! O how small I must become again! These souls will no longer recognize me on account of my littleness."

In preparation for this little life of our Saint, Francesca van der Kley delved into all the existing works in English, French and Italian. She was first attracted to Mary Magdalen because this Saint is the Patroness of the Carmelite Third Order Secular of Our Lady of Mount Carmel to which she belongs. Up to the present time only one American book has been published on

the life of this great Carmelite Mystic. It was written by Father Placido Fabrini and was translated and published privately by Father Anthony Isoleri, Rector of St. Mary Magdalen de' Pazzi Church, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, in the year 1900. This year of 1957 was chosen for the present publication because it commemorates the three hundred and fiftieth anniversary of St. Mary Magdalen's death.

It is my privilege to be personally acquainted with the author. Her broad experience includes a long career in publishing. For many years she held the position of Managing Editor of one of the leading American fashion magazines. In that capacity she held positions in New York, Paris, Berlin and London. But she has since voluntarily left the world of business and the arts, finding that nothing is so satisfying as serving the Greatest Lady of all, Mary. Her present life is dedicated to that end: promoting the love for Mary and Mary's love of prayer and sacrifice as seen in the great Marian Saints.

My fervent prayer is that this heart stirring life of St. Mary Magdalen may be read by hundreds and thousands of Marian souls today and create a popular demand for further studies of this Carmelite Marian Mystic. Her legacy is one of perfect obedience, of burning love for Jesus Crucified, of total consecration to the Glorious Virgin. Even in the midst of her ecstasies she responded to the commands of obedience. In perfect love of the Crucified, she was the first to help others and concern herself with their needs. Frequently she renewed her consecration to Mary with the little prayer: "Receive me, O Mary, and keep me in thy care."

Fr. Howard Rafferty, O.Carm.,
Provincial Director,
Third Order Secular of Our Lady of Mt. Carmel

Chapter 1

BACKGROUND

EARLY in the sixteenth century, the city of Florence went through troublous times, as did all of Italy. The Renaissance, after having scaled the heights of spiritual and terrestial refinements, crumbled under a brutal force. Rome had been sacked. Churches were profaned, the Vatican was pillaged, works of art were mutilated. Men, women, children and religious were at the mercy of a soldiery drunk with power. The Dukes of Florence—successive members of the de' Medici family—were not distinguished for virtues.

Destined to stand out in shining purity against this background and to cast a piercing gleam of sanctity into the darkness, though she herself remained hidden from the world, was one of Carmel's most exquisite and illustrious jewels. In scarcely more than a hundred years after her birth, she was to be known for all time as St. Mary Magdalen de' Pazzi. But we first make her acquaintance as Catherine, daughter of the

union of two renowned families—the de' Pazzi and the de' Buondelmonti. In the year 1559, Camillo di Geri de' Pazzi had wed Maria di Lorenzo de' Buodelmonti. These two were noble not only in blood, but were alike in nobility of heart and pious Christian love. They were justly honored as models of conjugal harmony. Among their four children, one would become a precious gem in the spiritual crown of the Carmelite Order.

Chapter 2

BIRTH OF CATHERINE

THIS "lily of Florence" was born April 2, 1566. On the following day, she was spiritually reborn in her baptism in the Oratory of St. John the Baptist in Florence, receiving the name of Catherine. Her devotion to St. Catherine of Siena as one of her patron saints was to be lifelong. And indeed the two were similarly marked by great celestial favors. Catherine de' Pazzi was the second child and only daughter of her parents. Before her had come her brother Geri, and after her came two more—Alemanno and Baccio.

Even as an infant at the breast, Catherine was never for a moment a troublesome baby. And, as she grew, she unconsciously gave nothing but joy and delight to all those around her. She had rare gifts—beauty of face and form, charm of manner. Surpassing all these, a certain amiable charity and a brilliance of mind showed itself in many natural talents. At the same time, she was completely unaffected, docile, and humble.

It is not easy to describe the childhood of this little girl without seeming to paint a picture of almost incredible perfection. But careful research has never discovered any unlovely faults to mar the record. Clearly, Divine Providence was planning to employ her as an example to encourage others struggling along the path of perfection and was setting her apart to claim her for God alone. Even in her tender years, Catherine showed a certain celestial preoccupation. It was as though she was guided by the inspirations of the Holy Trinity, the while God Himself was lovingly occupied with the unfolding of her spirituality. She had a predilection for heavenly things long before she could grasp their full meaning. For example, she was plainly delighted when devout conversation went on around her. However, when such opportunities were not present, she found her joy in voluntary solitude.

She would retire to some quiet corner, as though she longed for mental prayer. She had barely learned to read a bit when she came across a book called *The Symbol of Athanasius,* in which appeared lessons on the sublime Mysteries of the Faith and especially of the Holy

Trinity. This Catherine immediately carried to her mother, demanding further explanation of the text. In describing this experience to her Sisters in religion years later, she recalled that she had not really understood the words except by a sort of spiritual instinct, but that the influence on her life was immutable.

Chapter 3

CHILDHOOD

IT was not unusual for Catherine to search out older persons who could instruct her and who were invariably struck with wondering admiration at her hunger for spiritual truths and at her swift grasp of them. She could, and did, teach other children these mysteries of holy religion. It is safe to assume that she never really had to *learn* the practice of the Presence of God, as do most of us. She grew up in its embrace as in an atmosphere completely natural, even indispensable to her. She was but six years old when one morning she ran to her mother and clung to her with special affection. Her mother had just come from Mass, where she had received Holy Communion. The little daughter pressed close to her mother, saying, "Let me be near you, Mother, for you are fragrant with the perfume of Jesus."

Like all children, Catherine enjoyed hours of play and amusement—but she used to translate them into some form of sacred entertainment.

She would veil and dress herself as well as she could to simulate the habit of a nun, and thus she would recite her prayers. The procession of secular festivals, the idle chatter of worldly gossip of the vanities of the day, held no attraction for her. Instead of indulging the appetites of her senses, she chose to put a strict guard over them. In her meals, she was frugally satisfied with little. It was her delight to share with the poor, and often to give away her own meal to one of them. When she went with her family to their country villa during the hot summers, she loved to draw the children of the peasants around her to instruct them in religion. She used to help the servants with the housework so that they could finish their tasks quickly and have time to pray together. How often Catherine regretted the passage of summer, when she must return to the city and leave her "children"! On this account, her parents once consoled her by taking back to Florence with them a little daughter of one of their farmers, Giovanna by name, and Catherine continued with pleasure her instructions.

In a manner beyond her years, Catherine sensed the need and the privilege of taking a

share in the Passion of Jesus. She was ingenious in finding ways to do this, even beyond long hours of prayer. The discipline was then a common instrument of penance, but she did not stop with that. She broke off the thorny branches of the orange trees to fashion crowns and girdles to encircle her head and sides. Her nights were given in large part to penance, for then she thought to suffer undiscovered. She prevailed upon the servants not to warm her bed, as was the custom in winter, when nights in Italy are decidedly cold. Then she would remove the mattress and lie down on the bare straw. Her mother, however, soon found this out and took Catherine into her own bed, fearing that her daughter would impose too much strain on her already delicate constitution.

Catherine did not wait to be taught a method for meditation. She was so irresistibly drawn to recollection that she simply followed the impulse and withdrew as often as she could to some quiet spot, kneeling down in humble silence to see God's Holy Will. This is not to say, of course, that perfect recollection always resulted or that she had no trials or difficulties. In her inexperience, she often found it hard to

concentrate, and aridities assailed her. Undiscouraged, however, she would keep on with her prayer to the very end of the time she had allotted to it, finally emerging consoled and happy.

Noticing her excellent dispositions, Father Andrea Rossi, the Jesuit Confessor of her parents, paid particular attention to Catherine. And, when she was about nine years old, he gave her in brief form the simple principles of mental prayer. In addition, he gave her a book to use: *Meditations of Father Gasparo Loarte of the Society of Jesus.* With this help, the child made swift progress, and allowed nothing to interfere with her mental prayer each day. She could not have had a better foundation for the union with her Divine Saviour that was to be the central theme of her entire life.

Chapter 4

HOLY COMMUNION

CATHERINE'S first ten years were indeed one long smoothly unfolding preparation for the Holy Eucharist. Already she was devoted to adoration of the Blessed Sacrament and was ardently begging for the consolation of being permitted to take Holy Communion. In that day, her age was generally considered too young. But Father Rossi, realizing that she was keenly suffering from spiritual hunger and that her knowledge and understanding of divine matters were far beyond her years, gave the child a sweet surprise. He promised to fulfill her great wish on the Feast of the Annunciation of the Blessed Virgin. O happy day! On March 25, 1576, Catherine knew a comforting delight that she felt could never be surpassed when she received the Most Holy Sacrament in the Jesuit Church of San Giovannino. To her further intense joy, her Director allowed her to receive regularly each week. Her heart melted with love, which must have over flowed; for even

her outward appearance showed the effects and took on new joy and grace.

From then on, Catherine lived completely for this Divine Lover to Whom she so unreservedly gave her heart and soul. The weeks were successions of ardent thanksgivings and preparations. Suffused with holy purity herself, she eagerly reached out towards the heights of purity, which alone attracted her. It was natural, then, that her thoughts should turn to what she might offer to her Jesus. Her own heart told her: it should be perpetual virginity. Nothing less would be a fitting oblation. On Holy Thursday of that same year, after receiving Holy Communion, Catherine made her private vow of consecration to God, promising that she would take no spouse but her beloved Jesus. The Divine Bridegroom communicated to her His pleasure in His own sweet way. He placed on her finger a precious ring. This Catherine neither saw nor felt at the time. It was something He revealed to her later.

The abundance of Divine Love that existed between Catherine and her Jesus showed itself not merely in a general way, but occasionally in other specific manners. A couple of years

later, on the Feast of St. Andrew the Apostle, Catherine was walking with her mother in the country. Suddenly, the girl seemed to be beside herself, overwhelmed with emotion and unable to utter a word. Her mother, alarmed, at first thought it was a purely physical illness. But, when ordinary remedies failed and Catherine recovered only when the Divine Physician saw fit to relieve her, both mother and daughter were silently aware of the supernatural significance of the event. This, too, would be explained years afterward in the cloister.

Chapter 5

CONVENT LIFE

THE de' Pazzi family was closely knit by the human ties of mutual affection. When the possibility of any separation arose, the idea was a painful one to the devoted parents. However, when Catherine was fourteen, her father was appointed to serve for a time as Governor of Cortona, which meant leaving Florence. Somewhat reluctantly, he consented to letting his daughter go to boarding school at the Convent of San Giovanni dei Cavalieri, where one of her aunts was a nun. This was done on the advice of Father Pietro Blanca, who had succeeded Father Rossi as the family Confessor. The prospect pleased Catherine, who saw an opportunity for more time for prayer and meditation.

During the fifteen months that she spent with these religious, Catherine was radiantly happy, absorbing all that she could of monastic life. She was always so humble, so recollected and helpful, so devoted to prayer, that unconscious-

ly she was responsible for bringing into the cloister a rebirth of fervor. The nuns admired, even reverenced her, and would very much have liked to keep her there as one of them. But Catherine did not feel that to be God's Will for her. She considered herself too weak a plant to flourish anywhere but in a more strictly kept garden.

Upon finishing his governorship, Messer Camillo returned to Florence and brought his daughter again to the family home. Her mother, although overjoyed at the reunion, was shocked at the young girl's appearance. A physician was summoned, who immediately prescribed not only medications, but complete relaxation and a mineral water cure in the country. There, fortified by rest, good food, and quiet walks in the fresh air, Catherine immediately improved and was soon able to return to the city.

Chapter 6

A VOCATION DECIDED

BY now she was sixteen, an age when parents customarily began thinking of a daughter's marriage. Before they could go far with such a plan, Catherine determined to make her own intention known. For she still felt strongly that God wanted her for Himself alone. When her father heard her tell him that she would sooner not live than be prevented from entering a cloister, he was deeply grieved. But he generously tried to overcome his emotion, for he recognized the Voice of God speaking. He assured Catherine, to her immense relief, that he would not stand in her way. The mother was a bit more difficult to influence, for she had envisaged a brilliant social life for the girl. And to give her up to the impenetrable walls of a monastery seemed a rather cruel prospect to her affectionate heart. Gradually, she was won over. She noticed that Catherine's health languished amid worldly pursuits, and her conscience told her that Father Blanca was right

when he declared that Catherine truly had a religious vocation.

Which convent did he consider most suitable, asked the anxious parents. He mentioned two. Either the Dominican Convent of the Holy Cross, or the Carmel of St. Mary of the Angels. Catherine considered also a third, the Monastery of the Poor Clares, for she admired their austerity and poverty. But when the priest described the Rule of the Carmelites, with complete devotion to the interior life and frequent reception of the Holy Eucharist, her choice was made.

Chapter 7

CARMEL

IN 1582, on the Vigil of Assumption, Catherine entered the Monastero di Santa Maria degli Angeli, in the Borgo San Frediano. According to the custom then, she was merely an Aspirant for a visit of some ten days, after which she would return to her family until a final decision was reached. Catherine, assiduously applying herself to the mode of life at the monastery, was deeply satisfied and had no other desire than to remain. The nuns were most favorably impressed. But the dictates of prudence were followed, and the hopeful candidate rejoined her family for a waiting period of three months.

Catherine bore the delay patiently, striving to avoid vanities, following her quiet schedule of meditation and prayer. She went out as little as possible and did not even show any interest in the preparation of her convent trousseau. Finally, all was in readiness. Her parents were resigned; Carmel was awaiting her. On Satur-

day, December 1, 1582, she left her home for the last time. She did not know which was the greater—her unspeakable joy and relief at entering her "true home," or her overwhelming sensation of unworthiness of so tremendous a favor. The nuns themselves were filled with a holy delight at the prospect of receiving so promising a new Sister. When Chapter was held on the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, there was not a dissenting vote. January 30 was fixed as the date when Catherine would receive the holy habit.

The longed-for day arrived at last. Catherine had spent the previous day and night in solitary silence, deep prayer and meditation. No interruption to her fervor, not even a permissible visit at the grille with relatives or friends from the world would she indulge in, lest any outside influence infringe on the union that was to be hers. After the celebration of Holy Mass by the Reverend Agostino Campi, the Father Confessor of the Monastery, came the impressive ceremony of reception according to the rubrics of Carmel. It was a new spiritual baptism in which Caterina de' Pazzi become Suor Maria Maddalena, the bride of Jesus Crucified. Every

one marvelled at her humility and deep recollection. As the priest put the Crucifix into her eager hands, the Sisters were singing *"Mihi absit gloriari nisi in Cruce Domini nostri Jesu Christ."* (For me there is no glory save in the Cross of Our Lord Jesus Christ.)

Chapter 8

NOVITIATE

THAT evening, Sister Mary Magdalen placed herself in the hands of her Novice Mistress, saying that she gave herself up like a dead body, to obey, to be guided, and to be humiliated in every way, in order to kill all her self-love.

The joy of the young Novice manifested itself in a most practical manner, for she set to work with all her forces on the task of self-sanctification. She strove to please Our Lord perfectly through the most exact obedience to her superiors and to the Holy Rule. She followed the Community life in every detail, avoiding anything singular—for she valued unquestioning obedience more than the highest contemplation and private devotions chosen by her own will. In this way, she said, one could be certain of pleasing God. She prized obedience above all. But her "free time" and even part of her hours for rest she gave to prayer.

At household tasks, she was always the first to lend a hand. If she saw one of her compan-

ions sad, she would ask her to be of good cheer. For, she said, "sad souls give no joy to God." She herself kept continuously in the Presence of God and showed it in her bright and cheerful countenance. By her example, she encouraged all of the Postulants and Novices to vie with one another in leading wholly consecrated lives. She esteemed all more highly than herself, considering always that she was unworthy of the privilege of being in the cloister.

When it came time for the next profession of a group of Novices, Mary Magdalen longed to join them, but was not permitted to do so. She was assured that she could be professed just as soon as possible after her probation would be completed—which seemed to her a long separation indeed from her Heavenly Bridegroom. During Advent of 1583, she was so moved by love and by her conviction that Jesus was not sufficiently loved by all men, that she fell into a sort of trance. At first, the nuns thought it was an illness, and put her to bed. But they soon recognized the experience as one of wholly spiritual, not corporeal, significance. With the utmost humility, Sister Mary Magdalen quietly foretold that she would make her profession

by Veronica Vander Heyden

alone, that somehow they would be obliged to allow it.

In about a month, Mary Magdalen fell severely ill, with high fever, coughing, and pains. Four of the most skilled physicians were called in, but they could neither diagnose nor prescribe for the mysterious malady. "The outcome is in God's Hands," they agreed. Remedies were tried with no success. The more the young Sister suffered in her poor body, the more joyous and comforted her spirit seemed to be. As she was not one ever to waste pain, she fixed her gaze on the crucifix and rejoiced in suffering for her beloved Saviour.

Chapter 9

PROFESSION OF VOWS

SERIOUSLY troubled, the Mother Prioress sought counsel from Father Confessor and from the wisest of the nuns. They all agreed that Sister Mary Magdalen should be permitted to make her profession without further delay. The patient had grown so weak that they planned to hold the ceremony at her bed. She, however, felt such happiness and new strength at the prospect that she begged to go to the choir to pronounce her vows before the image of the Most Blessed Virgin. This was conceded, and the eighteen-year-old Mary Magdalen was borne on the arms of her Sisters to the altar on the morning of Trinity Sunday, May 29, 1584, where a little pallet had been arranged for her. Thus, midst her tears of grateful joy, she made her profession and received Holy Communion.

The ceremony over, she was carried back to her bed, where she asked to be left alone to rest. After an hour had passed, the infirmarian

wondered why no sound was heard, and so looked in. Drawing aside the bed curtains, she found the young Sister lying motionless in ecstasy, her eyes fixed on a wall crucifix. The Mother Prioress, the Novice Mistress, and the other nuns came to wonder at the marvellous sight, giving thanks to God for so great a favor. Mary Magdalen, unconscious of their presence, continued in this state for two hours, then returned to her usual condition.

Although during this happening, which was the first rapture in which her Sisters observed her, Mary Magdalen's aspect had taken on the glow and color of health, it now resumed the former pallor. And succeeding weeks saw the illness only increasing, despite the anguished prayers of the community. Mary Magdalen seemed to exist on almost no nourishment. Each day, Holy Communion was brought to her, and for some hours thereafter she would be rapt in ecstasy. In early July, she was miraculously and suddenly cured through the intercession of Blessed Maria Bagnesi, whose sepulchre was an object of veneration in the Monastery. Again, Sister Mary Magdalen took her place in the novitiate and gave herself up, with more fervor

than ever, to the observance of the Rule of Carmel. She performed all the exterior exercises with such purity of intention and such absorption in God that her interior recollection appeared never to be disturbed.

The ecstasies, however, continued and became even more protracted. Always, as we shall see later, her Divine Spouse would then carry on with her the most lovingly tender and intimate conversations. Yet from these sublime mysteries, Sister Mary Magdalen could pass with calm recollection to the most mundane tasks in kitchen and laundry. Nothing marred her obedience. Indeed, in the very midst of a rapture, she was able to hear and obey the voice of her superior.

by Veronica Vander Heyden

Chapter 10

ECSTASIES

THE Father Confessor instructed that all the inspired words of Sister Mary Magdalen while in ecstasy should be carefully noted in writing, and appointed some of the nuns for this task. And task it surely must have been, for these supernatural utterances were very rapidly spoken, usually requiring no less than three of the Sisters as amanuenses, while others acted as aides to catch any omissions or faults of transcription. The words were noted in successive phrases, these later to be carefully put together. (The valued manuscripts are today still preserved with great veneration in the Carmel of Florence.) Many of the ecstasies lasted not hours simply, but whole days and nights in succession. This explains the uneven qualities of the manuscripts and the difficulties in interpreting many of the passages. The more so, as these religious were not stylistically gifted as writers in a literary sense. However, the simplicity and the sincerity with which they wrote

are the best possible guarantee of authenticity. The Sister-secretaries themselves said that they were highly conscious of their own imperfections and lack of comprehension. They often felt incapable of putting into adequate words the inspirations of the Lord, and sometimes they did not fully understand everything said. But they put down everything as well as they could, in obedience. And we may well believe that they were helped by grace to complete their exacting assignment.

It would be a mistake to suppose that Mary Magdalen was a holy ecstatic and naught else. Striking as these raptures were, they represented but the lesser portion of her life. Limited to certain years, they do not constitute the proof of her sanctity. Rather is she revealed to us as a Saint in the contrasts to these ecstasies—her supernaturalizing of daily labor, her self-effacing obedience and modesty, her unceasing effort towards absolute purity of intention, doing all for love and reparation; her unquenchable thirst for suffering and humiliations; her glowing charity; her burning zeal for the Church. In ecstasies or out of them, she was completely dominated by the Holy Spirit, absorbed in God.

Chapter 11

RAPTURES OF LOVE

THE ecstasies fall into three periods. First, *I Quaranti Giorni*—the Forty Days. Directly after her profession in 1584, Mary Magdalen entered into ecstasy for two hours each morning after Holy Communion. These experiences preceded and followed the cure of her illness already mentioned.

Then, for a year, she had frequent short or long periods of ecstasies. And the third division is composed of other visions during ten days and nights, just preceding her supreme trial of five years of spiritual combat, from June, 1585, till June, 1590. After 1590 and until her death in 1607, the Saint knew ecstasies much more rarely. She led in exemplary fashion the common life in her monastery, possessed the calm of interior peace, but still suffered poignantly for love, both spiritually and physically.

The ecstasies are like meditations and thus always follow a certain pattern. The Saint

usually starts with the words, "after having received Holy Communion"; then quotes a Scriptural text, often from the Liturgy of the day; and afterwards enlarges upon this theme. Remember that she had practiced mental prayer since childhood, and with a remarkable degree of concentration. Here are ecstasies of pure love, of a Saint wholly transformed and submerged in God, who had no will but His Will, no life but to live, to suffer, and to love for the "Love that is not loved," as she herself expressed it. It was as if the Divine Heart of Jesus drew His new spouse suavely and tenderly into Its recesses, rejoicing in her purity, speaking to her with the softly caressing Voice of the Beloved. In the union that she had contracted with her Lord, she saw herself bound to the most Holy Trinity by the three bonds of her vows—Chastity, Obedience, and Poverty.

In the ecstasy of the happy day of Mary Magdalen's profession, she said: "... Jesus, caressing me gently as a new spouse, united me all to Him and hid me in His Heart, where I found a most sweet repose. Then it seemed to me that the Lord took away my own will and all of my desires, so that I could not wish or desire any-

thing except what He willed. I saw my will so conformed and so united to the Will of God that, of myself, I could will nothing. If it pleased God to damn me, I would still be content. I had no more care whether to die or to be well—I wanted only the Will of God.

"Finally, it seemed that Jesus and the Most Holy Trinity promised me that I would never commit mortal sin. And for this I was so happy that I could not help weeping."

It was in that holy disposition that, in spite of trials, sufferings, temptations and combat of the soul, Mary Magdalen continued throughout her entire religious life.

On June 2, 1584, the Saint said in an ecstasy that she saw the Blessed Virgin in Paradise on the right hand of Jesus. And the Blessed Mother smiled and said: "Ah! You have no idea of the gift that you received when you took the veil!" This gift was the Purity of the Virgin bestowed by Jesus.

In her ecstasy of June 21, Mary Magdalen considered the many aspects by which Our Lord manifests Himself to creatures. And she received from Him the reward of a mystic garment and learned how He wished her to be

totally passive. After this mystical clothing, the Heavenly Spouse "began to reprimand me, saying that He forbade me to do or to desire anything at all except what He wished or would accomplish in me. And He spoke thus: 'I desire that you should have neither joy nor sorrow, pleasure nor displeasure, hate nor love, wish nor desire; I want you to desire nothing, neither death, nor life, nor health, nor illness, neither heaven nor hell. I want you to be before Me as though you were not, neither humbling nor exalting yourself. You think or desire solely what I want, what I shall decide or shall accomplish in you.' As I was about to reply to Him that I would try, Jesus Love said to me: 'I do not even consent to let you say that, because I do not permit you to use your intelligence or your will or anything of yourself in any way.' "

Chapter 12

DIALOGUES

THIS union with Jesus, this penetration into the Heart of God, runs like a chain through all the ecstasies. In the one of June 27, the Saint saw Jesus and heard Him say: "Now, My spouse, My dove, I desire that you should enter a bit into My school." (The school was His Sacred Heart.) Finally, Jesus said: "My spouse, I wish you to offer your whole self to Me and that you unite yourself to Me by the path of Love." Then, says the Saint: "Offering all of myself completely to Jesus, I prayed the Unitive Love to realize this union, to unite me to Jesus, for there was no other way than by this Love itself. And immediately, by this means, I found myself entirely one with Jesus."

The many dialogues between the Saint and her Saviour are touching in the extreme, infused with all the ingenuousness of her youthful virginal love. There is one, for example, in which Jesus places in her heart the instruments of His Passion and she reminds Him that His

Crown of Thorns is still missing. Mary Magdalen says:

" 'O Lord, it seems to me that You have forgotten to give me, You know, that which caused such love and pain to the noblest part of Your Body.' And when, showing me two crowns, one of thorns, the other of very beautiful flowers, He said: 'Tell Me, which one do you want?' And He, making as though to give me the one of flowers, said smilingly: 'Well, I give it to you—it's this one, isn't it?' Then I said, 'No, no, Love, not that one at all—no! Love, You know quite well which one.' And then He put the one with the thorns into my heart along with the other sheaf, and He told me He would keep the flowers for me."

Mary Magdalen relates that Our Lord made a bundle of all His Passion and hid it in her heart, so that it would be forever imprinted on her memory. He gave her His Sacred Wounds, sending them into her hands, her feet, her side, like darts of fire. Then the pains and the affliction that she had felt disappeared, leaving her happy to see those wounds. But, also making her happy, they were not visible to other persons.

So Unitive Love took possession of her and showed her how to love so that she would never tire of loving. Jesus told her that He would give her this sort of "corporal abstraction" for the forty days following her profession, so that she would comprehend the ways of His Love more completely. But, after this time had passed, she would not have this exterior abstraction continuously—merely once in a while.

Later, she said that Jesus told her that He would take away the visible and exterior ecstasies for several reasons, of which she remembered only three. These were: First, so that she would be humble. Secondly, to make her understand that He wanted not just one thing from her, but that He wished to try her in various fashions. Thirdly, for love of creatures. He added, too, that she would also be tried in her religious life.

by Veronica Vander Heyden

Chapter 13

THE BLESSED VIRGIN

THE Blessed Virgin Mary had a conspicuous role in these revelations. On the Feast of the Assumption, 1584, to take but one instance, Mary Magdalen saw the Blessed Mother kiss each of the nuns with the kiss of peace, and to herself was given in addition a beautiful golden chain as a sign of love and charity. Further, the Saint related: "Then, while we were singing *Gloria in excelsis Deo,* I saw the glorious Virgin Mary with her mantle open, as though she wanted to receive all who came to her. And I saw that her graces spread over the whole world."

It was on that same day that Mary Magdalen, going into the choir with three of her companions from the novitiate—Sister Veronica, Sister Maria Pacifica, and Sister Catherina Eletta—saw the Blessed Virgin seated on a high throne in unspeakable glory and beauty, having the moon at her feet and on her head a crown of stars shining with great splendor. And the

Holy Virgin's mantle was of indescribable loveliness, all covered with the most beauteous jewels. The Blessed Mother said, "It was you who gave me these jewels by saying the Rosary, for each word of the Rosary placed a jewel in my mantle."

True daughter of the Heavenly Mother that she was, the qualities of Mary Magdalen that stand out foremost are probably simplicity and purity. Simplicity that clearly mirrored the Love of God. Absolute purity of intention. Mary Magdalen perfectly understood that purity was so delicate that it could dwell only where all self-love had been wiped out. "If Mary had not abandoned her own will, perhaps, O Lord, You would not have been incarnated in her!"

One of Mary Magdalen's own sayings was: "Do not delude yourselves; no one can enter the temple of purity except by that of simplicity."

Chapter 14

THREE VIRTUES

MARY Magdalen insisted that purity "abhors every taste, sentiment and imagination outside of God." "... The splendor and candor of virginity are without ornament, and almost tarnished, without the practice of the other two virtues (humility and charity). Virginity is not acceptable to Thee at all, O my God, without humility and charity. Many souls are now in hell, who have kept virginity; but no one will ever be found in the Heavenly Fatherland who has not possessed during this life humility and charity." She warns against ugly self-love; "The fight we must carry on with this self-love all our lifetime consists in never doing anything for our own honor and comfort." And, in speaking of humility and poverty, she says: "Whoever loves these virtues does not waste any words in complaining, always thinks of the poverty of Christ, and makes as little of her own body as the king does

of the spider's web. Humility should be practiced with gravity, and poverty with hilarity."

Since the Saint lived so close to Jesus and Mary in her ecstasies, we can readily understand that Mary Magdalen, even in her darkest earthly trials, was never without heavenly inspiration. Submerging her will wholly in that of her Lord, her eyes fixed on the path of perfection that would one day end in her being led by the Blessed Virgin to her King.

How Mary must have rejoiced in the virginal purity of this Saint, in the humility and poverty that Mary Magdalen de' Pazzi so lovingly embraced in imitation of her Crucified Spouse! She counted herself as nothing and placed herself unconditionally in Mary's hands. This Blessed Mother she likened to a fountain sealed with the immaculate seal of the Eternal Word —a fountain irrigating the whole earth, making fertile the ground, giving the angels cause for rejoicing, and refreshing the souls in Purgatory; a fountain spurting up to Heaven. "In Mary is enclosed God Himself, the whole of Heaven and all creatures. By the blood taken from Mary, all the world was saved.

"O glorious Mary, glorious is he also that follows thee! But to follow thee we must first die to ourselves; then we must crown Mary spiritually, offering all merits to her, together with all the praises that have been given to her blessed soul and the merits of all the saints, having a great desire to increase her glory as far as we can. This offering is very acceptable to the Heart of Mary. As our Mother goes up to Heaven, there must be in us a burning desire to follow her. O most great Mary, take my soul and my will, and give thine. . . . During the portion of life which is left to me, I wish to enjoy thee, and do nothing else but admire thee."

Thus has Saint Mary Magdalen de' Pazzi put into words that sublime devotion to Mary, the Blessed Mother of God, who is most truly our own Mother also. And thus did the Saint live in and for Mary, giving the example that can be followed by even the least of us as a sure guide along the path of sanctity.

Chapter 15

SUFFERING

BUT the religious life was not simply a path of sweet ecstasies for our Saint. Our Lord, to fill her wholly with Himself, would further refine the humble purity of her soul. As a refuge in the temptations that were in store for her, He designated to her various special Patrons. First, the Eternal Father as Master; Jesus Himself as Spouse; the Blessed Virgin Mary as a dear Mother; St. Augustine, St. Catherine of Siena, St. Angelus, the Carmelite, and the Blessed Maria Bagnesi as counsellors; and her Angel Guardian to record all that would be taught her.

Although Mary Magdalen had already suffered much, especially in a physical manner, her heaviest trials and sufferings were to be spiritual and far more demanding and severe. For these, all was a preparation. During her novitiate, she had steadfastly exercised continuous mortification and abnegation of her will. Suffering only caused her to yearn for more and more

of it to bear for the love of God. Her Sisters were never able to discover either her natural antipathies or her preferences. She had devised a kind of suffering that she called *hidden,* which she continued throughout her life. This meant that she would appear delighted at whatever caused her natural pain; and she would be indifferent or even repulsed by what would have indulged her preferences. This plan she practised humbly, without meaning to disclose it. But the nuns finally discovered it because Mary Magdalen innocently gave herself away by suggesting to the others this means of suffering for their greater perfection. They were quick to comprehend that she would never have proposed anything that she had not done herself.

Mary Magdalen unconsciously cast the light of sanctity about her, encouraging and inspiring all who came in contact with her. Humble and obedient, entirely oblivious of self, she was continually absorbed in God. Had it been possible, she would have concealed her ecstasies and other divine favors. She showed the greatest charity and love towards her companions, choosing always the lesser part and the heaviest tasks for herself. Her reverence for the monastic life

was such that she simply could not fathom how it could tolerate what she considered her unworthiness. With ingenuous simplicity, she disclosed her soul's constant recollection when she observed to another Novice: "Praying in choir or doing some manual work is all one to me; I make no difference between them, and it seems to me that sometimes I even find God more in labor than in prayer." She was continually praising God, and from household tasks she would fall smoothly into an ecstasy and then go back to the work again as if without interruption.

Our Lord, had strengthened His mystic fiancee with abundant graces, and presently He was to admit her also to the sufferings of His Passion. On Easter Monday, 1585, in response to her entreaties, He showed her His Five Wounds. On the Vigil of the Feast of St. Catherine of Siena, Jesus, accompanied by that Saint and by St. Augustine, appeared and placed on Mary Magdalen's finger the nuptial ring—invisible pledge of divine union during the supreme trial that was soon to engulf her for five long years.

Chapter 16

YEARS OF TRIAL

JESUS chose her to suffer and to repair for the offenses committed against God by His creatures. He demanded much, for He knew that she loved so much that she would give herself totally to Him. Finally, on May 21, 1585, and on the two following days, He made His wish known to her. He desired that henceforth she should take no food other than bread and water, except on feast days, when she would have Lenten fare. Her body was to have but five hours' nightly sleep on a pallet of straw. Her will, understanding, memory, must be utterly submerged in the Divine Will. Mary Magdalen's submission was total, even joyful and eager. Despite agonizing trials and terriffic temptations and assaults of the devil, this was her program for five expiatory years. After two years, it was all confirmed to her again by the Voice of God, and even augmented. Besides all the former conditions, she then went unshod

and wore but a single thin tunic, without regard to either heat or cold.

Mary Magdalen asked nothing for herself but to rest continually in the Divine Will. Everything that the Word demanded of her she regarded as a small work in comparison with the happiness that she saw prepared for her soul. She said: "If it were sufficient, O my God, for the salvation of creatures, I would live a thousand years in this world, and I would think myself happy." Throughout her life on earth, the Saint never shrank from suffering of any sort, never temporized, did not ask even for death. To suffer and *not* to die, this seem to her the greatest privilege. *Domine, non mori, sed pati!* (Lord, not death, but suffering!)

The acts of virtue of this saintly soul were never sullied by the least trace of pride. Even when it was obvious to others that she was surrounded by divine favors, she grasped every opportunity to humiliate herself. Her obedience was unhesitating, both to God and to her immediate superiors. When at first she was ordered to partake of ordinary food, she promptly submitted, and tried to eat like the rest of the community. But now it was a physical im-

possibility for her system to retain anything other than bread and water without vomiting and hemorrhages. Seeing this and also being convinced that God's Will was operating, the Father Confessor freely permitted Mary Magdalen to follow what was so evidently the command of Divine Providence. Whatever fears and doubts she may have felt as to her future, she laid in the Hands of God. He had warned her that temptations would be grievous, but that she would be supported by His grace even when she was unable to feel its comforts and consolations. *Sufficit mihi gratia tua,* "Thy grace is enough for me," responded Mary Magdalen. Then Our Lord told her how she would arm herself against all assaults. At the first of the principal temptations, she would take purity; at the second, His Heart and her own; at the third, His Stigmata; at the fourth, the Crown of Thorns which He had given her; at the fifth, her great desire for the salvation of creatures.

Chapter 17

TEMPTATIONS

MANY and grievous indeed were the temptations and desolations that followed now in constant succession. The lonely victim seemed to be surrounded by demons and raging beasts of prey. Infernal spectres and unseen hands tormented and beat her, often throwing her to the ground, even at Holy Mass. Her own Sisters began to doubt and abandon her. She was tempted against faith, and afflicted when in the act of receiving Holy Communion, yet she did not give ground to the enemy. At Divine Office, Satan filled her ears with horrible blasphemies. Furious because of her constancy, the evil one tried to persuade her of the enmity of God, until she almost despaired and was tempted by ideas of abandoning religion and seeking death.

All the while, though Mary Magdalen went through indescribable desolation, she never yielded, but threw herself into the merciful arms of Jesus and Mary. Meek and peaceful, she blessed

God and placed all her hope in Him. The serenity of her countenance never altered. Far from seeking to avoid abasements, she sought them out and took every means to war against pride and bodily comforts. No temptation was spared her, not even those of gluttony and impurity. But she did so much violence to her body and her mind that it was she who put the devil to shame.

It would seem that she was tried beyond the ordinary strength of human nature. With the Cross and the discipline, she firmly fastened herself to God and in Him found all her endurance. She would willingly have died rather than oppose obedience. And, when often she felt herself in complete darkness, there still remained in her heart, as she once told her Mistress, "that little lamp of good will not to offend God."

Although Mary Magdalen was never relieved by any ordinary comforts, the Divine Goodness permitted her some supernatural consolations from time to time during these five harsh years. He spoke to her in the Most Holy Sacrament. He raised her to Him occasionally in celestial ecstasies. He sent apparitions, either of her Di-

vine Bridegroom, His Blessed Mother, the angels, or her patron saints. And also in other specific ways. There was that Shrove Tuesday when she beheld Jesus before Pilate. Also the day when the Blessed Virgin placed in her arms the newborn *Bambino.* And in August, 1586, she had the supreme consolation of being assured by God Himself that she would not be deceived in regard to supernatural gifts. At this period, her ecstasies were more than usually protracted and comforting. On September 17, 1587, she was fervently praying to the Blessed Virgin that she might be victorious over temptations against chastity. The Blessed Mother then appeared to console her, assuring Mary Magdalen that she had never offended God. As a reward, the holy hands of Mary placed on her head a pure white veil, with the promise that in future she would never again suffer from disordered desires of the flesh.

In the following year, on the Feast of St. Albert the Carmelite, Jesus clothed Mary Magdalen with an invisible habit of great beauty and gave her sacramental Communion.

It was also during this five-year period that God gave her the seal of His approval by per-

mitting various miracles to occur through her intercessions. By her prayers, several nuns of the Community were restored from sickness to health; a young Florentine girl was released from possession by the devil; and some spoiled wine was changed into good, so that by it a sick nun was cured.

by Veronica Vander Heyden

Chapter 18

DAYS OF ATONEMENT

ON Easter Sunday, April 22, 1590, God revealed to Mary Magdalen during an ecstasy that the end of her torments and trials was nearing. However, she must first go through fifty more rigorous days in atonement for all the faults she might have committed during the five years. Thus began a new Lent of rigid penance, in which the Saint redoubled her mortifications, with severe fasting, scourgings, and other practices in addition to all her usual austerities.

On the eve of Pentecost, the Lord again took her into ecstasy and revealed that for the next three days, He wanted her all to Himself. During this time, she might rejoice and feast in God after her victorious trial; and then listen to the Voice of the Divine Will as a guide to her future. Mary Magdalen saw a long procession of saints and of her special protectors, for all Heaven seemed to rejoice with her. They adorned her with jewels and rich gifts drawn

from the Eternal Father's bosom. At the end of her rapture, Mary Magdalen renewed her consecration to the Blessed Virgin in the Choir. "O most pure Mary, I offer and give myself to thee, not only with the purity and innocence I received when I consecrated myself to thee, but with that innocence more adorned and purified. Receive me, then, O Mary, and keep me in thy care." It was characteristic of the Saint that during all her life she never thought of herself as other than a totally dependent and devoted child of Mary.

Mary Magdalen's exultant bliss was such as not to be described in words. And how her loving soul must have rejoiced when, on the following morning, while in ecstasy after Holy Communion, Jesus appeared to her and gave her a glorious reward. It was that in contrast to the horrible sights to which she had been exposed for those five years, she would henceforth have forever before her eyes the Presence of her Lord. Immediately Mary Magdalen perceived the dear holy Babe, then Jesus the Youth and the Man. This ecstasy lasted about twenty-one hours, filled with delightful revelations and divine instructions. Jesus told

her all that He wished for her, and especially how she must practice the virtues of charity, mercy and purity, accompanied by holy humility. These heavenly conversations were heard by all the religious of the monastery, who united in praising God for His goodness. The words of the Saint to her Master were also very beautiful; so inspiring, indeed, that one would like to quote them all. When Mary Magdalen beheld a vision of Jesus at the Well of Samaria, she longed to serve Him, and saw how she could do this in serving her neighbor out of love for Him. Charity would be the precious ointment of this Magdalen. "The tears with which I shall wash Thy holy Feet will be that charity described by St. Paul, which consists in weeping with those who weep, and rejoicing with those who rejoice." ... Regarding *words* and *works,* Mary Magdalen said this: "... Ah! yes, I understand; because Thou rewardest more a fervent desire of doing a work when one can not do it, than the work itself when done without the desire...." How well the Saint exemplified all this in her daily life, which was spent in loving God and neighbor, and in recompensing Him for all the neglect and offense

of souls who did not love and were not generous!

In all the records of the ecstasies, Latin is abundantly mingled with the vernacular. Constantly Mary Magdalen quoted long texts from Scripture, and with amazingly few inaccuracies. Yet she was untaught in Biblical language and was no profound theologian. This was yet an added proof that God used her as His mouthpiece.

Chapter 19

HER GIFTS

OUR Lord reposed great confidence in His dear daughter, for He constantly endowed her with extraordinary gifts. Frequently He revealed to her the states of souls already in the other life, such as when she saw the deliverance of her own brother's soul from purgatory. She often beheld various saints in their glory. And she had the power of seeing far-off things as though they were present, or of foretelling hidden future events. Maria de' Medici, who married Henri IV and became Queen of France, visited the monastery on various occasions and requested advice and prayers from Mary Magdalen. And all that the Saint foretold in her regard actually came to pass.

Mary Magdaen, however, never sought singular marks of favor nor failed to avoid contact with the world insofar as possible within the bounds of charity. She was completely candid and innocent, always believing the best of every one and imputing only to herself faults and imperfections. No secondary end clouded any of

her actions. She remarked: "If I thought that I might become a shining seraph by speaking a single word with any other purpose than the love of God, even though He would not be offended by it, I would not utter it." She was totally detached, and loved all creatures only in their relation to God. So great was her purity and so tremendous her horror of sin, that she could not conceive how any Christian could offend God with deliberate intention. But she saw the futility of her burning desire to blot out all the sins of the world, and this caused her bitter tears which she never ceased to mingle with the Passion of Jesus Christ and the Sorrows of Mary.

It was with real relief that Mary Magdalen now resumed the more ordinary life of the community. She partook again of the common fare, tempered by her usual austerities, and meticulously followed the Rule of Carmel to the smallest detail. Her soul remained hidden in God, the while she labored and prayed incessantly, and her visible ecstasies decreased. She never spared herself when a soul was at stake, and often passed entire nights in mortification and petition to obtain the mercy of God.

The crowning of her happiness lay always in the reception of the Most Blessed Sacrament, and by her words and example she incited ever-increasing devotion to the Holy Eucharist in the hearts of her Sisters. Her reverence for the Holy Eucharist was so profound that she said to her Novices: "... Oh! if we would penetrate it! Oh! if we would know it! We would not approach Holy Communion so much at random, nor would we for such trifling causes neglect to receive it, but we would think well on it before omitting it!"

It is impossible not to reflect that all the sentiments which Mary Magdalen expressed in her cloistered life are just as appropriate and sound in their application to our life in the world today as they were then within the seclusion of the monastery. Mary Magdalen de' Pazzi was in truth a sublime saint who attained to extraordinary heights. But at the same time, how practical she was—and is!

Chapter 20

OFFICES AND TEACHINGS

BEING so incessantly instructed by the Holy Spirit and therefore so imbued with true monastic wisdom, it was inevitable that Mary Magdalen should be charged with important offices in the community. She was successively Portress, Sub-Mistress of Novices, and Sacristan. From October 6, 1595, she was Mistress of Novices, until her election to Sub-Prioress in 1604. She was peculiarly fitted for these functions, for Our Lord Himself revealed to her a detailed Rule of Life and specific principles in regard to the virtues that He wished her especially to practice. Thus she was able to give her Novices the benefit of almost direct instruction from the Divine Word. Always she insisted on absolute purity of intention with no other motive than the greater glory of God. She waited so lovingly upon all the Sisters that they used to call her the Mother of Charity.

But although she was never so strict with others as she was with herself, Mary Magdalen

bent every effort to instill in the souls entrusted to her the virtues most pleasing to God. Charity, prayer, humility, devotion to the Holy Eucharist and profound love of the Rule, these were particularly stressed. And she had a very special gift of penetrating the hearts of those whom she was charged with guiding to perfection.

Mary Magdalen never ceased to impress upon her Novices that purity must be absolute and always accompanied by charity and humility. Self-love was abhorrent to her, something that must be fought as long as life lasts. She was pained whenever she observed any negligences in any religious, and would have liked to bring all the cloistered families in the world back to the ideal of fervor.

When any vice existed, she clearly saw its roots. And many of her exhortations, both in and out of ecstasy, were on the subject of that purity which she considered so essential. In speaking of this, she was once inspired to say: "... It is kept off by the least look not given for God; by all the words not uttered in praise of God or for the benefit of the neighbor." She cautioned that candor and simplicity are indis-

pensable, and that it is a grievous thing to try to hide one's faults or excuse one's self to God's minister in the Sacrament of Penance. "... O Purity and simplicity! ... These virtues cannot be acquired except by one who possesses interior love. Love is found in many, but not the interior kind." Always she returns to love, for Mary Magdalen herself was steeped in holy love.

Let us look at a few of the profound sayings of St. Mary Magdalen, the truth and beauty of which she herself was the living proof. Here are a few, out of many equally striking and inspiring.

"To die to one's self and be lost in God is the surest guarantee for eternity.

"A Novice must abandon herself, and be as dead in the hands of her Mistress.

"Chastity is a rose which does not blossom except in closed gardens and among thorns. It is that which erects for the soul of a religious a throne of ivory up in heaven.

"O good Jesus! How much sweetness is enclosed in this naked expression: Will of God!

"As far as I am concerned, I feel no great desire to go to heaven, as there is nothing to suffer

there; and I regret that this one thing be wanting in the perfection of beatitude.

"Oh, what a shame. To solace ourselves among roses, whilst Christ walks among thorns!

"The most excessive pain becomes glorious and tastes agreeably, when one looks at Jesus on the Cross.

"The silence of the lips suffices not, if the silence of the heart is not kept.

"Keep your eyes always open to the virtues, and closed to the imperfections of your neighbor."

Chapter 21

REVERENCE

OUR Saint had the highest conceivable esteem for the religious state and a profound reverence for the holy priesthood. She could not bear the thought of the slightest laxity or neglect of disciplined observance. And, although she regarded herself as a "useless servant," she would have liked to bring every Order back to its original fervor and zeal if the least breath of the world had affected it. She was constantly disposing the nuns to a stricter observance of their Rule and Constitutions, and she never ceased regretting that the monastery did not suffer more abject misery and dire poverty. Prelates of the Church, recognizing her holiness, often consulted her or asked her opinion. This caused her confusion of spirit on account of her humility, and she felt herself unworthy to advise them beyond what obedience demanded. She invariably recommended total abandonment to the Will of God, with unlimited charity and purity of intention. In

some of her ecstasies, she dictated rare letters to various prelates, including Cardinal Alessandro de' Medici, Archbishop of Florence, who was afterwards Pope Leo XI. In these she urged renewed zeal in favor of religious observance. The nuns wrote the letters down, but they were not usually sent and came to view only after the death of the Saint. All were fired with a burning desire to see complete unity in the Mystical Body of Christ, led by God's priests (she called them *christs*), who would give unreservedly of the treasures of the Blood and who would spend themselves even unto death to see the Will of God accomplished.

Chapter 22

PURELY FOR GOD

MARY Magdalen, wishing her oblation to be complete, never considered that she had suffered enough for God. What could she, a poor religious, give to God Who had given her all things? By the vows of holy religion she had divested herself not merely of all material things, but even of herself and her own will. And so she gave up to her Creator the gift that He had granted her—sensible spiritual comfort and sweetness. At the end of her five-year combat, God had assured her the enjoyment of His Divine Presence. But she, though gratefully accepting the support of Divine Grace, relinquished freely all consolation and sweetness.

Now her ecstasies were much less frequent. Occasionally they brought her the delights of love. But otherwise her life became an arid desert. And her own humility made this dryness still more painful. Nevertheless, she continued in every exercise of piety with the ut-

most devotion and exactitude, disregarding her repugnance and weariness, supported by pure faith. Although her conduct appeared faultless to all about her, she placed herself as below the lowest of sinners. She sought out the most humiliating of mortifications, and did her best to be regarded as contemptible and treated accordingly. The most worn-out and patched habit she saved from the discard, in order to wear it herself. And she continually asked to be corrected and punished by her Sisters.

She not only exposed everything that she saw as an imperfection in herself, but she tried to hide her virtues or make them appear more deserving of blame than of praise. She used to say to one of her Novices whose esteem she would willingly have despoiled: "O Sister, I have already committed so many sins, pray to God to have mercy on me; do me this charity." It is clear that pride never had a chance to root itself in her, for she regarded herself as less than nothing before the Majesty of God. Doubtless, her voluntary annihilation of self drew her all the more quickly and surely to Divine Union.

Chapter 23

CRESCENDO

ALTHOUGH Mary Magdalen was still what today would be considered young in years, she had lived long and intensely in the service of her Beloved. At the turn of the seventeenth century, her worn body was beginning to show the cruel ravages of her austerities. But the more she suffered, the more she thirsted to suffer for God. She was the living expression of her characteristic ejaculation, *"Non mori, sed pati!"* (Not death, but suffering!) She grieved to think that there might not be sufficient time left to attain the fullness of suffering that she desired to offer to her Lord. One day, in 1602, while listening to the reading in the refectory, she was struck by the mention in a treatise of *"naked* suffering" for the love of God. Obeying an impulse, Mary Magdalen arose and manifested to Mother Evangelista del Giocondo, then Prioress, how she herself felt that God would give her this desirable favor. No news could have caused Mary Magdalen greater joy and gratitude than this presentiment.

Now physical sufferings were noticeably added to the spiritual feeling of desolation and the extreme aridities that sought without success to undermine the fortitude of the Saint. But she heroically continued to follow all the community exercises, lest she excuse her poor body on false pretexts of weakness and indulgence. She was seized with a severe cold, and she coughed pitiably, yet she took no remedies and was all the more on her guard against the onslaught of the senses. In April of 1603, a violent fever attacked her, with a hemorrhage of the lungs. At first, she tried to conceal the condition, but further attacks necessitated some medication and rest in bed under obedience. In a short time, she did resume her duties (she was still Mistress of Novices), though she continued to lose strength. In July and August, there was a repetition of the symptoms, so severe that it was feared her death was imminent. But the Saint assured her superiors that the time had not yet come and that she would finish her term of office.

And so she kept on, faithful to her duties, disregarding her weakness and pains, even when the hemorrhages at intervals reappeared. Her

companions were greatly concerned about her, but she managed by persuasion to obtain permission to abstain and fast with the community during the following Lent of 1604. This she rigorously did until the Saturday before Passion Sunday, when again she had a hemorrhage and was forced by obedience to take to her bed. She believed that on account of her sins she was not deserving of completing the Lenten practices.

The aridities continued, but on June 24 she had a singular ecstasy, which she recognized as her last. She comprehended that she must go through the throes of extreme desolation, that this would be the "naked suffering" for which she had asked. This ecstasy lasted for eight hours, during which she urged all the nuns to embrace also this naked suffering for the attainment of perfection. She was heard to say: "O my Jesus, Thou wilt that I become as a very little girl; nay, Thou wilt that I be born again! O how small must I become again! These souls will no longer recognize me on account of my littleness."

Chapter 24

THE SUB-PRIORESS

WHEN the community elections took place the following October, her Sisters very much wanted to have her as their Prioress. When Mary Magdalen heard of this, she immediately put forward all the reasons possible to dissuade them, humbly stressing her failing health. A compromise was reached, and Mary Magdalen was chosen Sub-Prioress, so that again obedience took precedence over her humility. She tried for eight days to fulfill every duty of her new office, and made haste to arrange various matters concerning a still more strict observance of the Rule. Then, however, her raging fever so enfeebled her courageous body that she was forced to take to the poor bed on which she was to suffer torments for thirty months. Her suffering became so acute that she felt as though razors were dismembering her frame. Pain in the head and jaws was so excruciating that all her teeth were finally drawn—a measure that afforded no relief and only added to her

distress. Her bones pierced the thin envelopes of flesh and caused open wounds. Every movement was an agony. A human copy of her Crucified Saviour, Mary Magdalen refused any alleviation and clung tenaciously with Jesus to the Cross.

Still she considered herself totally unworthy, even of this suffering, and in the darkness of her anguish her great fear was that she might offend God. She asked not for relief, but patience, and exhorted the nuns to pray for this intention. When she was no longer able to say the Divine Office, she followed it mentally while the Sister Infirmarian read it to her, often striking her breast and exclaiming, *"Deus, propitius esto mihi peccatori!"* (Lord, be good to me, a sinner.) No sensations of heavenly sweetness assuaged her thirst. The chalice was bitter, but she drank of it to the dregs.

With the most pitiful pleading, she begged her Sisters to pray for her eternal salvation. Apprehensively, as if overwhelmed by the magnitude of her supposed sins, she would ask her Confessor, "Father, do you think I shall be saved?" When he sought to reassure her and expressed his natural surprise that she of all

creatures should pose this anxious question, Mary Magdalen answered, "Father, this is a very serious thing; a creature like myself, having never done any good, to have to appear before God!"

Deprived of all material and spiritual comfort, it would seem that God had chosen to inflict upon her the trial most repugnant to her nature, and it cost her lively spirit sorely to be feebly confined to bed in apparent uselessness. But her abandonment to His Will was one of total generosity, for she realized the inestimable value of suffering. She gave heartfelt thanks that her life was prolonged so that she could experience this *naked suffering,* saying: "O Lord, if Thou are pleased I should stay in this bed suffering till the Day of Judgment, Thy Will be done." At the very moments when she was enduring the most exquisite pain, she would smile through her natural tears, that she might compassionate her Sisters. When she was no longer able to rise and go to Holy Communion with the others, she received in bed. And nothing would induce her to break her fast, although her weakness was extreme whenever she went for more than a few hours without a small

quantity of nourishment. She endlessly besought favors for all suffering souls, making continual offerings of the Blood of Jesus. She also practiced the most thoughtful charity towords her Sisters, disregarding her own afflictions in order to comfort them. If a Sister were dying, although Mary Magdalen could not hasten to her as was her wont in former days, she had herself carried there, so as to give her assistance at the last moment. She would say: "As the Bridegroom does not come to me, I will be near *them* when He comes for them."

Despite the gravity of her condition, she continued to lie on her hard straw pallet with the woolen sheets which were not exchanged for linen ones until obedience commanded. Many were the proofs that she gave of her meekness and humility. Not only did she publicly beg God's forgiveness for her sins, but she entreated all of the nuns to forgive her the scandals and annoyances that she might have caused them. The greater her contempt of self, to be sure, the more tenderness of love and admiration she unconsciously aroused in those around her.

Chapter 25

HER LAST DAYS

IT was incomprehensible to the physicians that the poor sufferer continued to exist. At last, on May 13, 1607, the Confessor, Father Puccini, resolved to anoint her. Joyfully Mary Magdalen prepared herself. Again, with the Sisters gathered around her in her cell, she begged pardon for all her faults. Thanking them one and all for their endurance of her, she left them the legacy of three salutary counsels. First, that they should meticulously observe their Rule to the smallest detail, choosing only superiors who had great zeal for it. Secondly, that they should seek and love holy poverty and religious simplicity. Thirdly, that they should love one another in mutual charity, for the honor of God. She then received Extreme Unction with profound humility and devotion, answering in a clear voice all the prayers of the Ceremony.

With assurance, she encouraged the good Father Confessor to proceed on a trip that he had previously planned to one of the famous

sanctuaries, Mount Senario, a project that he had given up because he was anxious to be with the penitent at the final agony. She promised him that he should find her still alive upon his return, and asked that meanwhile he should enlist the prayers of the Servite monks at the shrine for her salvation. Father Puccini acceded to the request, remaining absent for three days.

For the next twelve days, Mary Magdalen continued in life, though it appeared to be a veritable purgatory of torture. Her Sisters, inconsolable at their impending loss, came in a constant stream to her bedside, begging her intercession for them in heaven, her advice, her instructions. And, unmindful of herself, although bearing the most excruciating pains of body and spirit, she was the one that supported and comforted them, encouraging them by her serenity and firing them with zeal by her tender counsels, all of which were centered in fraternal charity.

Still Mary Magdalen refused all the physical alleviations that were suggested to her, and, while never quite free from her fear lest she offend God she delighted in the piercing joy of

naked suffering. "Christ on the Cross," she would say, "received no comfort."

On the twenty-fourth of May, Feast of the Ascension, she felt the end slowly approaching. With increasing devotion, she spoke to her Sisters of divine things, often kissing her Crucifix, and during the night she asked that the Penitential Psalms, the Litanies, the Symbol of St. Athanasius and other prayers be read to her. Just before the approach of dawn on May 25, she begged for Viaticum. After receiving and giving herself to prolonged acts of love and thanksgiving, she bade a most affectionate farewell to all of her Sisters, entreating their pardon and benediction, and promising to intercede for them in eternity. A great peace and serenity surrounded her, and she appeared as a jubilant bride going forth to her nuptials. Mary Magdalen also took humble leave of her Father Confessor, asking his blessing. Then, with her characteristic exquisite consideration, she requested that he go and rest for five hours, to return for her death.

Chapter 26

UNTO DEATH

WHEN Father Puccini came again at the allotted time, he found the patient almost moribund. Once more, the community assembled, thinking that every feeble breath would be the last. But Mary Magdalen continued to live, or rather, to agonize. The hour to say Mass and give Holy Communion to the nuns arrived. Father left for the sacristy. He had just begun to vest when the Sister Sacristan hurried in to ask him to return in order to be present at the moment of death. Following an inspiration from God, Father sent this message to the Mother Prioress: "Tell Sister Mary Magdalen that, as she has been obedient in life, so she must also be in death, and to wait until I have finished saying Mass and giving Communion to the nuns."

As she had lived, so Mary Magdalen could not expire except under obedience! When in her quasi-coma she heard the message from Mother Evangelista, her dimmed eyes shone

with a new light, and she smilingly murmured, *"Benedictus Deus."* (Blessed be God.) Then, as if further to reassure her Sisters, she swallowed a bit of nourishment. With her accustomed patience, she waited the necessary time, so that Father found her unchanged upon his return from Mass. She appeared to be much pleased at the comfort he afforded her, and made an effort to grasp the Crucifix in her hands. The nuns were singing hymns and divine praises that she had requested, although they could not repress their tears. Calmly, between two and three o'clock on the afternoon of Friday, May 25, 1607, Mary Magdalen de' Pazzi passed from her earthly paradise, known as Carmel, to the eternal one where she would unite in everlasting love with the Beloved of her soul. She was then in her forty-first year, twenty-four of which had been spent in religion. It might be more accurate to say that she had already spent forty-one years with God alone.

The poor emaciated features now took on a heavenly radiance and the bloom of restored health. The flower-strewn remains were venerated by crowds (and the flowers had constantly

to be renewed, because they were taken away by visitors as precious relics). "The Saint has died! The Saint!" was the cry of throngs in Florence, as they hurried to the monastery church, where the body was exposed. A young man who was leading a life of debauchery came and gazed upon her. Whereupon the head of Mary Magdalen suddenly turned to one side, as though unable to bear a defiled glance. The sinner, amazed and shamed, fell to the ground in contrite repentance. He acknowledged his sins and began a new life of atonement.

Chapter 27

MIRACLES AND GLORY

OTHER miracles and cures followed in rapid succession. The body had, according to the monastic custom of the time, been placed without embalming in a wooden coffin behind the main altar. A year later, it was exhumed and was discovered to be intact, moreover, a sweetly perfumed and healing oil flowed from the bones for about twelve years and continued to distill its fragrance during the Process before Canonization.

Devotion to Mary Magdalen de' Pazzi spread swiftly over the whole of Europe. In 1611, the Cardinal Archbishop of Florence, Alexander Marzi Medici, following the request of the Sovereign Pontiff, gathered together one hundred and eight testimonies to the heroic virtues of Mary Magdalen and her miraculous interventions. There followed numerous examinations by medical authorities and investigation by the Sacred Congregation of Rites, before Mary Magdalen was declared a *Beata* by a proclamation

of Pope Urban VIII in 1626. Her feast was joyously celebrated annually, and miracles and cures continued to multiply.

On April 28, 1669, in the Pontificate of Clement IX, Maria Maddalena de' Pazzi, daughter of Florence and of Carmel, was solemnly enrolled in the number of the Saints.

For eight days, a great religious and civil festival was celebrated in Florence by rich and poor, by young and old.

Today, the Monastery of the Carmelite nuns in Florence is in another location and is known as the Monastero delle Carmelitani di S. Maria Maddalena de' Pazzi. There the body of the Saint is preserved, incorrupt. Her daughters venerate her memory and strive to be, like their Saint and Mother, loving Spouses of the Crucified and true children of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

Chapter 28

LUSTRE THAT LASTS

THE de' Pazzi family had been famed for centuries for its illustrious valor. Its members had often been decorated and honored by emperors and kings. As independent lords, they distinguished themselves in the Florentine Republic and had figured conspicuously near rulers and Popes. Among them were knights, embassadors, castellans, bishops, orators, and generals.

But in all their lineage, no de' Pazzi approached the luminous splendor of Catherine, who became Saint Mary Magdalen de' Pazzi, the Saint of Florence, the seraph of Carmel. Other de' Pazzis had fought with material weapons for temporal ends. She triumphed with spiritual arms, overcoming nature for an eternal goal. When they were ambassadors, she was a mediatrix with God, imploring mercy for all mankind. While their influence was limited by their times, hers flowed through the walls of the cloister to inspire society through all the ages.

In holy poverty, she amassed a treasure inexhaustible to share with the world and to unite earth with heaven.

* * * *

The virgin, Mary Magdalen has chosen the better part, which shall not be taken from her. Because of her spotless purity during life, her body, since her death, has been preserved free from all corruption.

℣. Pray for us, O holy Mary Magdalen.

℟. That we may be made worthy of the promises of Christ.

Let us pray.

O God, Lover of purity, Who didst inflame the heart of the Blessed Mary Magdalen with love for Thee, and didst adorn her with heavenly gifts, grant that we who venerate her memory may strive after a purity and charity like unto hers. Through Christ Our Lord. Amen.

THEOL... ...BRARY
CLAREMONT, CALIF.

429796